



## Exchange of Information

An exhibition of new sculptures and drawings  
by **David Reekie**

### **Dan Klein Associates**

43 Hugh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 1QJ

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24<sup>th</sup> January until 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2008

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**Cover:** Drawing for Exchange of Information IV (24.5x23.5cm).



**David Reekie in his Norwich studio with clay model and drawing for “The Interrogation”**  
(Clay model 27cm. wide x 20cm. deep x 36 cm. high)

This new series of work stems from an interest in our relationship with birds. Ten years ago I made a series of pieces called Love of Animals. In these sculptures I placed a figure of a man in a close and intimate position with an animal form, in fact he was holding the animal in his hand and their noses were almost touching. These works dealt, specifically, with the connection and affection that we have for our pets and perhaps with a wider theme of innocence and how we relate to the natural world around us.

I have now taken a more cynical stance in which this innocence is questioned. The bird has now become a symbol for unreliability and mistrust in our society and how information can be used against us.

These strange little ceramic figurines have a dark innocence of their own. Although they are mass produced and quickly hand painted in a spontaneous way, they have a quality and colour tone that lends itself well to this new body of work.

**David Reekie, November 2007.**

# David Reekie's observations in drawing and sculpture

In this new body of work David Reekie has chosen to make use of a collection of typically British little garden birds mass produced in Taiwan that initially caught his eye on one of his regular visits to charity shops. In all of his work David explores how we interact with our world and the endless variations that exist in the way we behave towards one another. He is amused by the posturing of politicians and demagogues gently ridiculing their vanity and treating any show of self importance with a light and humorous touch. Pithy observations captured in drawing and sculpture are a tongue in cheek running commentary on the absurdity of taking life too seriously. Uncomfortable truths are always tempered by his affectionate understanding of the uncertainties that underlie almost everything

David loves to frequent charity stores and jumble sales in his search for old glass and about two years ago the little birds caught his eye. Incurable collector that he is, he began stockpiling them. What appealed to him was their matter of fact and unpretentious quality. Unlike their luxurious counterparts in fine porcelain by Royal Worcester or Meissen these down to earth creatures made no attempt to impress. They were just little objects sold in gift shops, typically bought by little old ladies who would take them home and cherish them. As the collection grew and took up noticeable space in his studio, he began to wonder if there was any way he could incorporate them in his work, just as with previous series he had used other found objects, old spectacles, clock faces or little tin buckets. When I invited him to make a body of work for this exhibition the idea was already going

round in his head and he had done some drawings with the little birds perched on cactus plants. He has always had a love of animals. His home is never without a dog and a cat. There are chickens and geese in the garden from time to time and for a while a friendly ferret kept him company in his studio.

The little birds are engaged in a cosy tête à tête with their human counter parts, on the face of it a charming little idyllic tableau. But whether they are messengers or spies remains intentionally ambiguous. Who is exchanging information with whom? Are the birds our informants or are they just listening and learning with a view to disseminating their information to serve their own ends? Are they friends or just posing as friends? Should they trust humans? Should humans trust them?

On the surface man and bird look comfortable with one another: The little birds remain inscrutable whilst the humans cannot help registering their thoughts with puzzled, frightened or overly pensive facial expressions. It is easy to draw all sorts of parallels to these uncertain situations in the real world. As always in David Reekie's work irony and ambiguity lurk beneath a seemingly beguiling and innocent front.

**Dan Klein**

# The process of making

As always David Reekie's ideas are sparked off by his drawings – drawing is his way of writing down his thoughts and there is always a sketchbook to hand. In the case of the birds he first decides on which bird he will use and then works on a narrative to build into the work. When the idea has crystallised enough the modelling begins. The head is modelled in wax and the base in clay. The modelling is a gradual process that is detailed and refined over a period of about two weeks. When the day's modelling work is done on the head it is stored in a small refrigerator in the studio. The clay base is kept damp under a wet cloth. David looks at the two parts together again and again working out the mechanics of how they are going to fit and how the piece is going to work.

The process of carving in wax is both additive and reductive. In the beginning the head is just a featureless shape with

a hint of a nose. It gradually develops features through being sculpted and carved. The head is where the emphasis of the sculpture is centred. The clay base, though it has less detail, is just as demanding and has to be perfect. When David is satisfied with his modelling the two parts are ready to be cased up in a plaster and flint mould. Once the mould is dry enough the clay is removed from the mould and the wax head part is steamed out. The mould is now ready to be filled with glass cullet. Whilst the mould is still damp it is painted with vitreous enamels (enamel powders mixed with water) which will give the glass the kind of painterly quality that characterises David's drawings and which is transferred in this way to his sculptures.

Next a displacement test is done using a bucket of water in the manner of Archimedes, this will measure the quantity of glass needed. Once the calculations

have been done the mould is filled with cullet, fine crushed glass for the head area and slightly bigger chunks, mixed with the enamel colour, for the base. At this point the glass filled mould is transferred to a kiln and a firing programme started that in all takes about ten days. During the early part of firing, (during the first 24 hours) glass is added as the cullet melts down. After 48 hours the glass will have melted and there is nothing to do but wait for the firing cycle to run its course. After it has done so there is the annealing process when, during the best part of a week, the heat retention diminishes until the glass is cool enough for the mould to be broken away, carefully using wooden tools. The head has picked up every detail of the mould and the base every subtle colour variation. When cold the glass is ground and polished with diamond tools.

**Dan Klein**

**All the sculptures are lost wax cast glass with enamel colours and applied found objects.**

**The drawings are pencil or pencil and pastel on various papers.**

**All photography is by David Reekie with the exception of the portrait photograph which is by Duncan Reekie.**

# A little bird told me so

“A little bird told me so”. I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase. You may have said it yourself, probably to a small person, appealing to that mysterious inner knowledge which all children seem to possess that the world is entirely intelligible, if only we knew its secret language.

Yet there was a time when birds really did speak to us. In classical Greece and Rome there was a school of priests known as the augurs. These future-divining prophets claimed to foretell events by the way birds behaved – the directions from which they flew, or their formations in the sky. On the basis of these signs, the augurs could pronounce on public life and state policy. War might be declared by the way a chicken stretched its wing or pecked its food.

It may seem absurd today. But perhaps we should reflect that in 1997 the Labour

government offered a series of indices to measure the quality of life in this country. One of those yardsticks for the good life in Britain was bird populations. We are all now familiar how birds act as indicators for the quality of our environment. The owl, whose cry pierces the darkness, or the kestrel which wrestles the wind to a standstill at the motorway verge, will only survive if the trees, the insects, the other animals, the flowers and the countryside itself are all present and correct.

Birds speak to us in other sorts of ways. They tell us about season and place. One swallow, we say, doesn’t make a summer. Yet we know that spring is in full spate when we wake to that passionate outpouring of song called the dawn chorus. And when they all fall silent except for the sad cadence of robin song, we sense that autumn is on its way again, and the garden bonfire will soon be alight.

David Reekie, one of Britain’s finest figurative sculptors, not just in glass but in any medium, has tapped into this ancient human notion that birds speak to us. And yet Reekie being Reekie and a genius in the art of sculptural ambiguity – where a form or facial expression is seldom quite what it seems – the exchange of information is not straightforward.

These beautiful pieces hint at the multiple ways in which we have interpreted the idea of bird/human communication. Looking at some of them, for instance, you can imagine how that Everyman head is perhaps whispering some dark secret or political intrigue to the tiny creature at his shoulder. Conversely, you wonder if that same fallible human figure isn’t also now praying that his bird won’t ‘sing like a canary’ and reveal those same sinister confessions? Another sculpture hints at completely different ideas. Does the bird singing into the human ear, stand for the

way in which nature warns us of the consequences of our industrialised follies – perhaps the crisis of climate change or the ruin brought by pollution and intensive farming?

David Reekie’s sculptures are rich in humour and possibility, always provocative, and yet also open, democratic and – there’s that word again – ambiguous. Ultimately we are left to make up our own minds, which is one of the great beauties of this artist’s work. But one thing we do know. Like that child I mention in my opening paragraph, and like all true artists, Dave Reekie instinctively knows that there’s far more to life than meets the eye ... or the ear. And perhaps the birds are really speaking to us all.

## **Mark Cocker**

(author of *Birds Britannica & Crow Country: A Meditation on Birds, Landscape and Nature.*)



Exchange Of Information I

24cm. wide x 10cm. deep x 31cm. high

SOLD



Exchange Of Information II

22cm. wide x 17cm. deep x 31cm. high

£5,600



Exchange Of Information III

25cm. wide x 13cm. deep x 32cm. high

£5,600



Exchange Of Information IV

22cm. wide x 13cm. deep x 35cm. high

£5,600



### A Dark Tale

26cm. wide x 14cm. deep x 38cm. high

£6,400



### A Word In Your Ear

24cm. wide x 15cm. deep x 36cm. high

£6,000



A Little Bird Told Me

22cm. wide x 17cm. deep x 31cm. high

£5,600



The Interrogation

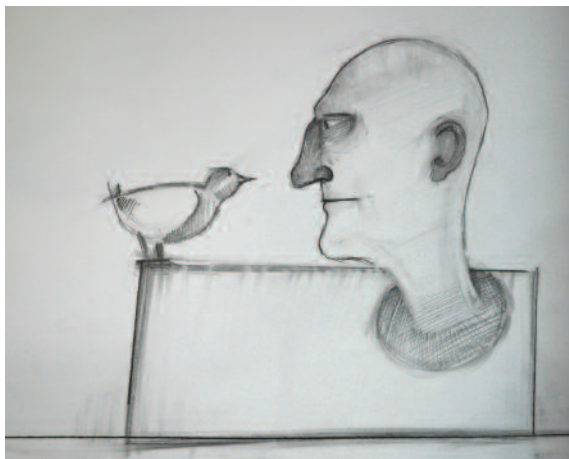
29cm. wide x 19cm. deep x 36cm. high

£8,000



£600

**Drawing for Exchange Of Information III**  
(34.5cm. x 33.5cm.)



£500

**Drawing for Exchange Of Information II**  
(33.5cm. x 40cm.)

David Reekie was born in Hackney London and studied glass at Stourbridge College of Art & Design (1967-1970). He taught glass at North Staffordshire Polytechnic from 1976-1986 and set up his own studio in 1975 in Lincoln. In 1986 he moved to Norwich, leaving teaching and becoming a full time artist. From 1994-1997 he was an International Council Member to Pilchuck Glass School, USA. In 1998 he was short-listed for the Jerwood Applied Arts Prize for Glass and his work was selected for exhibition at the G8 Summit in Birmingham. In 2002 he was appointed a member of the Advisory Council for North Lands Creative Glass, Scotland. In 2004 he was invited to attend a reception given at Buckingham Palace to celebrate British Design.

He has work in many public and private collections worldwide, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Crafts Council National Collection of Crafts, London. Castle Museum, Norwich. Manchester City Art Gallery. Birmingham City Museum & Art Gallery. Broadfield House Glass Museum. Glasmuseet Ebeltoft, Denmark. Alexander Tutsek-

Stiftung, Munich, Germany. Musée-Atelier du Verre de Sars Poterie, France.

He is invited to lecture and teach throughout the world including Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle (USA), AUS Glass conference in Canberra (Australia), The Royal College of Art in London, Wanganui University College of Learning in New Zealand, Ezra Glass Studios in Kanazo (Japan) and Espace Verre in Montreal (Canada).

“In his depiction of humdrum situations and our all-too-often inconclusive and inadequate responses, Reekie is prepared to chance a degree of risk unmatched by any other maker. He is only interested in exploring ideas; his glass must illuminate these purposefully. Unlike many of his contemporaries the intrinsic beauty of glass holds little fascination for Reekie; in his work the material must be pressed into the service of narrative and comment. His telling explorations of humankind’s obsessions are unique in contemporary British Glass and they tread a fine line between comedy and tragedy”  
(Jennifer Hawkins Opie)

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